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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the formation of coalitions and partnerships in Illinois has helped to impact public policy, sharing recommendations for forming coalitions that will help ensure educational excellence and equity in the 21st century through a shared decision-making process. After discussing the importance of forming coalitions, the paper presents an overview of the formulation and current status of the Illinois Network Coalition (INC). The INC was designed to promote high quality educational standards and offerings for all learners in Illinois through the sharing of information, the monitoring and informing of educational legislation, and the selected addressing of other educational issues in the state. Next, the paper explains the sequence of activities of the INC over 10 months. Finally, it presents nine recommendations for individuals and groups endeavoring to form a coalition. A concluding section discusses the future of teacher education, examining whether the establishment of coalitions will be necessary to ensure excellence and equity in the 21st century and questioning why teacher educators are not more involved in state agencies that dictate their future. (SM)

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Establishing Coalitions to Impact Public Policy: A Necessity for the 21st Century?

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Program Summary

Why form coalitions? How have coalitions impacted public policy in Illinois? What are recommendations for forming coalitions that will help ensure excellence & equity? These and other questions will be addressed.

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Establishing Coalitions to Impact Public Policy: A Necessity for the 21st Century?

Will the formation of coalitions be a necessity in the 21st century to ensure educational excellence and equity? In the state of Illinois, we have experienced what we believe has been occurring across the country to educators: the feeling of frustration-- frustration on the part of many groups of education professionals who wished to have some say about what was happening rather than simply being "done to" (Brulle, 1998). This feeling of frustration seemed to peak in the early part of this decade and served as a catalyst to form coalitions that provided a more influential voice.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. The first is to enter into dialogue regarding a major change process that has been ongoing in Illinois for the past several years and how coalitions and partnerships have helped to impact public policy. The second is to share recommendations for forming coalitions that will help ensure educational excellence and equity in the 21st century through a shared decision making process.

Why Form Coalitions

All of us in teacher education have experienced the frustration of having policies thrust upon us by those in policy-making roles in the state government. While well-meaning, these

policies are often reactions to events that may or may not have been the result of teacher preparation programs. In Illinois for example, the 1988 the state legislature passed a sweeping reform of the general education requirements for teachers based on some rather sensational articles in a Chicago paper that documented how several teachers were woefully deficient in their academic preparation. All teacher preparation institutions in the state already had stringent general education requirements, but the new legislation forced a change that made it extremely difficult for many students to complete their teacher preparation programs in a 4-year period of time. Other similar occurrences (e.g., inconsistent interpretations of program approval requirements, course mandates based on lobbying by special interest groups) led to a feeling of extreme frustration in Illinois. However, the best we could do until the early 1990s was to get together in our small groups (e.g., IATE, IACTE) and complain. A state legislator told us then that we in higher education would never accomplish anything at the policy level because we could not even agree among ourselves.

In 1993, however, an issue presented itself on a number of fronts that provided an ideal opportunity for collaboration and agreement. The issue was the induction of new teachers, and a number of groups became enthused about the possibilities at the same time. The Illinois Association of Teacher Educators had formed an *ad hoc* committee whose charge was to investigate means

by which we could help teachers grow and develop. IATE began discussions with the Golden Apple Foundation, an organization in Chicago formed to recognize excellent teachers and to promote high quality teacher development. The mutual interest in new teacher induction was discovered, and a tentative alliance was formed that also included Kappa Delta Pi, an education fraternity which was working on induction with the Golden Apple Foundation. At the same time, the Illinois Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (IACTE) was exploring possible induction scenarios as were the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the Illinois Staff Development Council. Through mutual introductions and connections, the six groups banded together in a loose coalition called the Coalition for Induction Activities (CIA). This organization sponsored a successful statewide conference on new teacher induction and developed a position paper on the topic. Papers had been produced in the past by each of the organizations, but this paper now represented over 10,000 Illinois educators, and it carried with it the power of consensus. The suggestions have formed the basis of new legislation now being considered that will have an impact on all new teachers in Illinois.

From this initial collaboration, several other collaborative efforts have been born. In 1997, IATE and IASCD held a joint fall conference that focused on Collaboration, Cooperation, and

Professional Development. The conference was attended by over 300 individuals and viewed as a great success. Another *ad hoc* group that included representatives from 8 organizations was formed in 1997 to respond to Illinois legislation dealing with alternative routes to certification. This group was able to have a significant influence on the rules and regulations that govern the alternative routes to certification legislation, once again demonstrating the power of collaborative efforts.

While the effects have been noteworthy, the going has not always been smooth. At the initial meetings, there was a noticeable lack of trust between the organizations. The higher education representatives did not necessarily trust the motives of the school-based personnel. The reciprocal was also true. Individual professional groups at first seemed to want to advance their own agendas rather than focus on the larger picture. With constant consultation, however, the groups eventually learned to respect each other and to focus on the galvanizing issues. This effort at collaboration has resulted in a new atmosphere of networking in Illinois. Never again will we attempt to influence public policy as a small organization. Instead, our current efforts continually focus on consensus-building and cooperation.

Overview of the Formulation and Current Status of the Illinois Network Coalition (INC)

As a way to formalize a long term commitment of cooperation and collaboration between state educational organizations, we

established the Illinois Network Coalition (INC). The first meeting of INC took place March 13, 1998. A letter of invitation was sent to fifteen Illinois professional education associations. Some organizations declined the invitation stating they believed in the objective of INC, but they either "had limited staff and other time commitments," or they had already dedicated their resources to other coalition agendas. One organization did not respond.

To date, representatives from ten professional organizations have attended coalition meetings. The coalition has met five times. Commitment to official membership in the group has not been requested to date. The representatives deemed it appropriate to determine the general goal and structure of the group prior to asking the respective organizations to make an official commitment to membership. Our quest for formal commitment to membership is anticipated by late Spring of 1999.

Sequence of Activities of the Illinois Network Coalition Over Ten Months

One of the first tasks was to formulate a statement of purpose of the coalition. The purpose of INC is to promote high quality educational standards and offerings for all learners in Illinois through the sharing of information, the monitoring and informing of educational legislation, and the selected addressing of other educational issues in the state. To this end, it was determined that outreach and communication with the various education agencies and state legislators would focus on

developing communication contacts, monitoring activities, and giving input to influence outcomes on educational issues. It was further determined that these goals could be accomplished by: (a) becoming acquainted with administrative systems and identifying contact people; (b) informing administrative systems (e.g. sending newsletters from member organizations to legislators and others); (c)monitoring legislative, Illinois State Board of Education and other administrative activities; (d) having continuing dialogue with contact persons within identified groups; and (e)initiating positions for legislation and/or the formulation of rules and regulations. It is important to note that the purpose of the activities is informational and not political. Several of the organizations participating in the coalition do not participate in political lobbying; consequently, the coalition will not support a particular political agenda, but will strive to be a recognized body with expertise which qualifies its members as valuable resources in the decision-making process.

The structure within which the group would function was determined as follows: (1) Representatives will participate in all general meetings and informational activities. Associations will have the option of selective participation regarding specific issues. In contacting various administrative systems, it will be made very clear which organizations are involved in addressing a particular issue. Positions on issues will not be determined by a majority vote; rather, organizations will determine participation for a particular issue on an individual

basis. (2) The coalition will have a Chair for one year so there will be a permanent contact person and continuity of information flow. The Chair will send notification of meetings which will include a summary of action items from the previous meeting. A secretary will function as a "back-up" note-taker at meetings and will help with items as needed. (3) Meetings will be hosted by participating organizations on a rotating basis. The host organization will pay for the postage to mail meeting notices and will provide refreshments. (4) Each organization will be responsible for expenses to support their representatives' participation. This may include mileage reimbursement, overnight stays, etc. Participating representatives must make arrangements with their respective organizations. (5) The coalition will meet 3 to 4 times a year depending on what is happening in the legislature, with the Illinois State Board of Education and what projects are being worked on. The time line for the meetings will be determined; options include meeting prior to, or during, legislative sessions. Special meetings may be called as specific issues come up and may be attended by organizations with a particular interest in a specific issue.

Next, the coalition established three task forces to accomplish the goals of the group. The first was the Information Sharing Task Force. The goal of this group was to determine how to best accomplish information flow in all directions (information between coalition representatives and between representatives and the general membership of their respective coalition organizations). To this end, the task force set up a

web site (http://www.uis.edu/webboard/~36). It is hoped that on an ongoing basis "reporters" from each member organization will put information on the website about issues and activities of interest to other educators. In addition, the task force will set up a listserve computer network.

The second group was the Publicity Task Force which had the goal of publicizing the coalition. It was determined that the development of a brochure, which would include the names of participating organizations with a statement of the purpose of each organization, would be a good way to do this. In addition, this task force would compile a list of contacts and determine the most effective way to keep the list updated and available to the membership.

The third group was the task force for Input and Influence. The goal of this group was to determine the best way to meet individuals who are in positions that make decisions which impact education in Illinois. This group would also formulate information which reflects the position of coalition members on particular issues and convey information to the appropriate person or organizations at the appropriate times.

The coalition is currently working on an information distribution project (Identify, Gather, and Distribute) for which it has identified current important issues on which to gather information and to distribute information to the membership. The membership will be asked whether the issues are significant to them, which issues they would like the coalition to address, and what outcomes they would like or what action they would like the

coalition to take.

Recommendations for Forming Coalitions

Given the events and process which transpired within the first year of the formulation of INC, the following recommendations are made to individuals and groups endeavoring to form a coalition. (1) Start the coalition with organizations with common goals. (2) Allow for flexibility and accommodations with respect to variances in positions on specific issues. (3) Allow for flexibility and accommodation of different levels of sophistication with respect to the influence process and finances within participating organizations. (4) Discourage duplication of representatives (i.e. one person should not represent more than one organization). (5) At least one organization must be invested in spearheading the formation of the coalition for at least one year until membership commitments have been made. (6) Allow time (at least one year) before requiring a commitment to membership. (7) A "linkage" between representatives and investment in the coalition must be accomplished. Therefore, consistent participation of the same representatives is most desirable. (8) Communication between the coalition representatives and their respective organizations is of utmost importance and must be stressed if the participating organizations are to feel linked to the coalition. (9) Since state organizations tend to meet infrequently during a year, it is important to have the coalition representatives set up a means of ongoing communication and input with their executive boards.

The Future of Teacher Education

Will the establishment of coalitions be a necessity to ensure excellence and equity for the 21st century? Although it is impossible to know the answer to this question with 100% certainty, speculation would lead one to believe yes. From the words of an Illinois State Board of Education advisor, individuals from teacher preparatory programs MUST become "politically savvy" and become more proactive in explaining "what they do and why they do it." When public policy issues regarding education are decided only by individuals out of the teaching profession, such as leaders of corporations, farm bureau agencies, and lawyers, the development and maintenance of high quality teacher education programs will become impossible.

Why are we as teacher educators not more involved in state agencies that dictate our future? There are at least three barriers. First, many education programs do not recognize state level activities as important. For example, at my institution we have a merit pay system that determines yearly faculty pay increase, if any. State level service activities are considered less important than national service activities and therefore, yield a lesser pay increase. The fact is, however, state policy often plays a much larger role in determining what we are expected to do within our teacher education program. The second barrier is lack of time. Many teacher education programs overload their faculty so they simply do not have the time for such activities. The third is the lack of a way to organize individuals so they can be heard. By forming coalitions in

Illinois, we have made progress in this area. Several of us have been asked to serve on Illinois State Board of Education advisory panels providing input into changes regarding teacher induction, assessment, professional development and other critical areas.

Therefore, in the 21st century teacher educators must consider ways we can encourage all teacher education institutions to become more proactive in state policy. We need to become "politically savvy" so individuals know what we do and why we do it. Perhaps forming coalitions and networks will help us accomplish this goal and prepare a better teacher in the next century.

Reference

Brulle, A. (1998). Influencing public policy through collaborative efforts. Eric Document Reproduction System ED417150.

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